FROM THE BOOKSHELF NO. 168 NOVEMBER 23, 1976
LINDA CASHDAN

"SINGIN AND SWINGIN AND GETTIN MERRY LIKE CHRISTMAS" BY MAYA ANGELOU

ANNCR: THE VOICE OF AMERICA BRINGS YOU ANOTHER IN THE WEEKLY SERIES .... FROM THE BOOKSHELF IN WHICH WE REPORT ON BOOKS AMERICANS ARE READING. TODAY.... "SINGIN' AND SWINGIN' AND GETTIN' MERRY LIKE CHRISTMAS"... AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY BY MAYA ANGELOU, PUBLISHED BY RANDOM HOUSE. HERE IS BOOK EDITOR_____WITH LINDA CASHDAN'S REPORT:

EDITOR: RARE INDEED IS THE PERSON WHOSE LIFE IS SO FULL, SO VARIED, AND SO FASCINATING THAT SHE CAN WRITE THREE BOOKS OF AUTOBIOGRAPHY DESCRIBING HER FIRST TWENTY-FIVE YEARS. BUT MAYA ANGELOU HAS LED THAT KIND OF LIFE. HER FIRST BOOK -- "I KNOW WHY THE CAGED BIRD SINGS" WAS A DESCRIPTION OF HER FIRST FIFTEEN YEARS GROWING UP POOR AND BLACK IN THE SOUTHERN UNITED STATES. HER SECOND BOOK, "GATHER TOGETHER IN MY NAME," WAS ABOUT HER STRUGGLES AS A TEENAGER, UNWED AND WITH AN INFANT SON, IN SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA. HER LATEST "SINGIN' AND SWINGIN' AND GETTIN' MERRY LIKE CHRISTMAS," BRIDGES THE GAP BETWEEN YOUTH AND ADULTHOOD, POVERTY AND FINANCIAL SUCCESS.

EACH BOOK IS A SEPARATE, TOTALLY DIFFERENT STORY. BUT THE THREE ARE UNITED IN THEIR DEPICTION OF THE CEASELESS SCRAMBLE OF ONE HUMAN BEING ... FIRST FOR SURVIVAL, THEN FOR SECURITY AND FINALLY FOR SUCCESS.

"MUSIC WAS MY REFUGE" MAYA ANGELOU WRITES AT THE BEGINNING OF SINGIN' AND SWINGIN'" I COULD CRAWL INTO THE SPACES

EDITOR: (CONT'D) BETWEEN THE NOTES AND CURL MY BACK TO LONELINESS." BY THE END OF THE BOOK, SHE HAS MADE MUSIC INTO HER PROFESSION. SHE HAS BECOME A FAMOUS SINGER AND DANCER. AT THE BEGINNING, HOWEVER, MUSIC IS ONLY A ROMANTIC ESCAPE FOR A GIRL WHO WORKS IN A RECORD STORE AND DREAMS OF SECURITY: AS SHE WRITES:

VOICE: "I WAS AS MUCH A PART OF THE ACQUISITIVE, SECURITY-CONSCIOUS FIFTIES AS THE QUIET YOUNG WHITE GIRLS WHO LIVED IN CLEAN MIDDLE CLASS NEIGHBORHOODS. WE DREAMED OF BEING ONE MAN'S WOMAN. WE FOUND OURSELVES TOO OFTEN UNMARRIED, BEARING LONELY PREGNANCIES AND WISHING FOR TWO AND A HALF CHILDREN EACH WHO WOULD GURGLE HAPPILY BEHIND THAT WHITE PICKET FENCE WHILE WE DROVE OUR MEN TO WORK IN OUR FRIENDLY-LOOKING STATION WAGONS. I BELIEVED THAT MARRIAGE WOULD GIVE ME A WORLD FREE FROM DANGER, DISEASE, AND WANT. IN THE RECORD STORE I LIVED FANTASY LIVES THROUGH THE MAUDLIN MELODIES OF THE FORTIES AND FIFITIES.

'YOU'D BE SO NICE TO COME HOME TO' WHOEVER YOU WERE."

EDITOR: SHE MARRIES, AND MARRIAGE DOES BRING SECURITY -- BUT SUFFOCATING SECURITY. HER MARRIAGE BREAKS UP AND SHE FINDS HERSELF JOB-HUNTING AGAIN. SHE BEGINS HER MUSICAL CAREER IN THE FIRST JOB VACANCY SHE FINDS -- AS A DANCER IN A STRIP TEASE CLUB. SHE PROVES A MUCH BETTER DANCER THAN STRIPPER. PEOPLE BEGIN TO COME TO SEE HER DANCE. BUT THAT IS NOT EXACTLY WHAT THE MANAGEMENT HAD IN MIND. SHE IS FIRED, AND AGAIN MOLDS HER PROFESSIONAL TALENT TO MEET THE JOB MARKET'S OPENINGS. SHE HEARS OF A JOB IN A SMALL NIGHTCLUB....NOT FOR A DANCER, THOUGH, FOR A SINGER. NO MATTER. SHE DECIDES TO BECOME A SINGER:

VOICE: (CONT'D) "'LISTEN, YVONNE,' I TOLD HER, 'I'M GOING TO SING CALYPSO AND I'M GOING TO BE GOOD.' I DIDN'T RELISH HAVING TO DEFEND MYSELF. SHE WAS MY FRIEND. WE SHARED SECRETS AND WOES AND EACH OTHER'S MONEY. WE HAD KEYS TO EACH OTHERS HOUSES AND TOGETHER WATCHED OUR CHILDREN GROW. 'JUST LISTEN TO THIS.' I GOT UP AND TOOK A PLACE IN FRONT OF THE COFFEE TABLE. MY VOICE FALTERED AND FELL. I LIFTED IT IN A SHOUT. I FLED BETWEEN AND OVER THE NOTES LIKE A LONG DISTANCE RUNNER ON A DOWNHILL PATCH. WHEN IT WAS ALL OVER, I HAD SUNG ABOUT THREE KEYS AND YVONNE LEANED BACK ON THE NEARLY PAID FOR SOFA. A SMALL RESIGNED SMILE PLAYED HIDE-AND-SEEK ON HER FACE. 'I'LL SAY THIS FOR YOU,' SHE SAID 'YOU'VE GOT A LOT OF NERVE.' AND SHE WAS RIGHT."

EDITOR: NERVE AND TALENT PROVE AN UNBEATABLE COMBINATION. MAYA ANGELOU SUCCEEDS, FIRST AS A NIGHTCLUB SINGER, LATER AS A LEAD SINGER AND DANCER IN THE OPERA "PORGY AND BESS" AS IT TOURS EUROPE. AND FINALLY -- AS THIS BOOK ENDS -- SHE IS A SINGER WITH TOP BILLING AT A LAS VEGAS NIGHTCLUB.

MAYA ANGELOU'S FIRST TWO BOOKS WERE BEST-SELLERS, AND "SINGIN' AND SWINGIN'" MAY VERY WELL DO JUST AS WELL. SHE HAS LED A MUCH MORE INTERESTING LIFE THAN MOST PEOPLE. SHE HAS A GOOD STORY TO TELL. BUT MORE IMPORTANT, SHE TELLS A GOOD STORY WELL. A SENSE OF HUMOR ENABLES HER TO SEE THE AMUSING SIDE OF PATHOS, EVEN WHEN IT MEANS LAUGHING AT HERSELF A LITTLE BIT. A KEEN SENSE OF INTROSPECTION HELPS HER DESCRIBE THE CONFLICTING EMOTIONS BETWEEN A MOTHER'S INVOLVEMENT IN HER SON AND A WOMAN'S DESIRE TO

EDITOR: (CONT'D) MAKE SOMETHING OF HER CAREER. SOME OF THE MOST MOVING PASSAGES IN THIS BOOK ARE THOSE ABOUT CLYDE, HER SON, AND HER CONCERNS FOR HIM, HER DELIGHT IN HIM, AND THE INTENSE PLEASURES, AND PAINS, OF MOTHERHOOD.

MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL, HOWEVER, MAYA ANGELOU WRITES BEAUTIFULLY. READING THIS BOOK IS A THOROUGHLY ENJOYABLE EXPERIENCE. AND THAT IS ONE ASPECT OF MAYA ANGELOU'S TALENT THAT SHE HAS NOT YET WRITTEN ABOUT: HER CAREER AS A WRITER. HER WRITING YEARS MAY BE THE SUBJECT OF FUTURE BOOKS, PERHAPS A FOURTH OR EVEN FIFTH ADDITION TO THIS AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL SERIES. IF SHE COULD MAINTAIN THE CALIBER SHE HAS EXHIBITED IN HER FIRST THREE BOOKS, A FOURTH WOULD BE A VALUABLE LITERARY ADDITION.

ANNCR: YOU'VE BEEN LISTENING TO FROM THE BOOKSHELF, ANOTHER IN OUR VOA SERIES OF REPORTS ON BOOKS AMERICANS ARE READING. JOIN US NEXT _____ FOR ANOTHER SELECTION FROM THE BOOKSHELF.

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